

## Educational Leadership in the Spiritual Way

*“Whatever will be, will be”*

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**Background:** The article provides a broad, concise overview with the intent to provoke scholarly argument and debate on an illusive, yet majestic, theme.

**Purpose:** In this article, the authors make the case for educational leaders who are spiritual.

**Argument:** The contemporary postmodern world society is very cosmopolitan and pluralistic. The complexities and confusion that result call for individuals in educational leadership roles, at all levels, to truly know themselves and to act out of sound beliefs and values. In human affairs, leadership need be moral, meditative, and enlightened with a clear vision of “the big picture” and the future. At one time relegated to lower levels of importance, a spiritual approach through service, tolerance, empathy, and empowering those being led has now gained top prominence in theory and practice and will surely continue to do so. Spirituality is deep, internal, and loving. And people of all specific religious persuasions are included, hopefully embracing common values as reflected in doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. A multidimensional, perhaps sometimes misdirected, world seemingly focused on materialism, characterized by the likes of stem cell research, “intelligent design,” environmental concern, and quantum understanding creates a tall order for educational leaders. The article’s ideas are presented in narrative which is well known for being an effective means of expressing spiritual material. As all persons are searching and no one is always right, differing interpretations of terms and expressions and language looseness are expected. Although those who are enlightened have taken a leap of faith, spirituality for many calls for broaching it in incremental stages, all the while living with inconsecutiveness and contradiction.

**Conclusion:** Among those who truly appreciate these things and still have the courage to embrace and explore, it is known that ultimately it is only through a larger meaning of the spiritual way that effective leadership can be effected. This article emphasizes mindfulness meditation (within) and compassion for others (without) to achieve educational leadership in the spiritual way --- casting things in a proper perspective of time, history, and what is known to be good and worthwhile.

**Keywords:** educational leadership, spirituality, spiritual literacy

### 靈性層面的教育領導 隨遇而安

**背景：**本文提供寬廣、簡明的概要，引發出對一個似乎虛幻但卻是莊嚴題材的學術論據辯論。

**目的：**作者在這篇文章裡提出支持靈性教育領導的理由。

**論據：**當今的後現代世界，社會非常都市化和多元性，複雜和混亂的境況需要在不同層面的個別教育領導，真確地知道自己角色，有穩固的信仰和價值觀去面對環境。領導需要道德、深思熟慮、清晰的宏觀和認識未來的趨勢等背景去處理人事。以前對於從靈性層面方面的服務、容忍、同情、和授權等的貶謫，現今在理論和實踐上變為很受重視，這情況肯定將繼續下去。靈性是內心深處的愛，涵蓋了各種不同宗教人士和那些接受愛人如己這觀念的人。現今這多維，或許有時被誤導的世界，表面上集中於唯物主義、幹細胞研究、聰明的設計、關注環境、和量子理解等問題，為教育領導創造一個高的要求。本文以記敘文的手法來撰寫，這是表達靈性材料有效的渠道。因為所有人都在搜尋，並且沒人總是正確的，故此詞語不同的解釋和表達，以及語言的鬆散性是意料中事，雖然那些被啓迪者已作了信心的躍進，很多人在靈性方面卻是按經歷增加，沿途活在阻滯和矛盾中。

**結論：**在那些真實地讚賞這些事而仍然有勇氣擁抱和探索者中，他們曉得領導最後只能通過更寬廣的屬靈渠道才能生效。本文強調專心的內在凝思，及外在對他人達到在靈性層面教育領導的愛惜，這種領導將事物安排在良好和有價值的時序、適當的歷史透視中。

**關鍵詞：**教育領導, 靈性, 屬靈文化

## Introduction

The authors were partly inspired by a book of reflections by Prather (1998) to write this succinct article at hand.

First, it must be acknowledged that many societies in the so-called advanced or “developed countries” seem generally “crazy” and confused. In one sense, it is a magnificent, pluralistic craziness (Barlosky, 2005). In another sense it is a very dangerous craziness (Bork, 1997). An emphasis on technology and materialism, and such things as over-dependency on oil and electricity, and a growing global water crisis, are major parts of the problem. Once human beings have a taste of luxury, it is difficult for them to recall simpler times. People’s true art of thinking and ability to look after themselves are in dire danger (Rozak, 1986). The proven values of self-respect, compassion, and dignity are being replaced by money and power (Bork, 1997). Through the use of the worldwide Internet, a person can experience a tremendous feeling of power. With such developments as the European Union (EU) and the common Eurodollar currency, one world government seems to be on the horizon. Global environmental concerns are a commendable upside.

Effective leaders of today—including educational leaders – need to be spiritual (Creighton, 1999; Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1999; Maxwell, 2003; Solomon & Hunter, 2002; Thom, 1984; 2002), to embrace their true selves (Lowen, 1997), and to be able to differentiate moral from other decisions (Fullan, 2003; Lowen, 1997; Thom, 2003a). He/she needs practice “just being” or “mindfulness,” before “doing” (Heider, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). One witnesses this everywhere in literature (theory) and in practice.

The remainder of this article follows the designed format of “Important Ideas,” “What is Spirituality?”, “What is Spirituality in Education?” “Spiritual

Literacy in Educational Leadership,” “Challenges,” and “Conclusion,” consecutive headings that interrelates one to the other, back to forward.

## Important Ideas

At the outset, although it may appear otherwise, there is a plethora of core, systemically connected ideas that surround all of this, as follows:

- mindfulness meditation is of great value;
- culture, language, and narrative determine our thoughts;
- everyone has biases;
- there is both an inner and outer self; a person is comprised of the brain organ (Restak, 2001), a mind, a body, and a soul that includes a conscience;
- within a person, there is continual wrestling between “angel” and “devil;”
- in a particular culture, people are conditioned and form illusions (Hofstede, 1980);
- there is real value in knowing history and learning from its mistakes;
- it is through the mind that one makes a leap to the spiritual and faith;
- a person’s mother and father are important influences for the person’s entire life, particularly with respect to spirituality and life coping skills, respectively;
- mature leaders operate on a basis of facts, intuition, and feelings.

## What is Spirituality?

Spirituality and religion are juxtaposed by some people and not by others (Beck, 1986). Further, theology is yet another thing. While there are many people today who would say they are religious; there are also many other who would say they are spiritual but not very religious. Writer David Tacey coined a new term for this modern non-religious spirituality, called ‘generic spirituality’. “It’s part of a genre of

talking about meaning, and talking about what's sacred in life but not necessarily being part of a specific religious tradition" (Tacey, 2000).

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines spirituality as, "the quality or state of being spiritual." Then defines spiritual as "of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit," and finally defines spirit as "an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms" and "the immaterial intelligent or sentient part of a person; the soul." Merriam gives many definitions for soul: "the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life"; "the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings, or the universe"; "person's total self"; "an active or essential part"; "a moving spirit" and "the moral and emotional nature of human beings" (Merriam Webster Online Dictionary: <http://www.m-w.com/>). From these many definitions we can get a glimpse of how complex the concept of spirituality is, and its root in the human spirit or soul.

Evidence that the spiritual component of individuals exists is in the fact that a much incapacitate person still can be lucid, coherent, and happy. Spirituality is about meaning, inspiration and wisdom. It is about a deeper sense of purpose and place. It is about connectedness and the highest aspirations of the human being. We can also see that it is an integral part of each person, and it would seem almost tragic that more is not done in our education system to nurture this basic core of each human being.

Spirituality should also encompass an awareness of inner reflective life; attention to what nourishes us; provides balance, makes us whole; a deepening connection to what really matters in our own life, in our relationships, in our life work; a gentle lively sense of humour; an optimistic perspective that highlights the goodness in people and one's life's circumstances; a profound connection with nature that allows us to take deep comfort and inspiration from the natural world; and

a willingness to listen compassionately to the needs and concerns of others.

Tibetan Buddhist Master Sogyal Rinpoche gives this illuminating aspect of spirituality:

True spirituality also is to be aware that if we are interdependent with everything and everyone else, even our smallest, least significant thought, word, and action have real consequences throughout the universe. Throw a pebble into a pond. It sends a shiver across the surface of the water. Ripples merge into one another and create new ones. Everything is inextricably interrelated. We come to realize we are responsible for everything we do, say, or think, responsible in fact for ourselves, everyone, and everything else, and the entire universe (Rinpoche, 1995, p. 39).

To conclude, religion and theology are human-made, with religion representing human attempts to order human behaviour in an ethical way and theology representing human attempts to order the thoughts of God. Accompanying this is the notion that what makes spiritually appealing to many is that it has no firm definition (Dr. Daniel Klassen, personal interview, October 3, 2005). Maslow (1954) 's famous "Hierarchy of Human Needs " model reflects that everyone is comprised of body, mind, and spirit. In later years, Maslow (1971) added to his framework the highest spiritual levels of "Sense of Wonder" and "Sense of Order," they too not being firmly defined. Indeed, there is conceptual exploration yet to take place.

## What is Spirituality in Education?

To many individuals, spirituality in education defies clear definition. Yet this should not dissuade attempts at definition such as is inductively done here. Confusion with organized religious instruction in schools such as that found in religious school systems need be recognized as a confounding factor. . A more "spiritual"

education should open the mind, the heart, and the spirit of the student (Bereiter, 1972). A 'spiritual' education should provide opportunities for students to be creative, contemplative, and imaginative. How? Among other things, mind fullness meditation provides a vehicle. At the end of the day, spiritual education should encourage students to go deep into themselves, into nature, and into human affairs and teach the value of service to others, to life, and to our planet (Moore, 1994; Villa & Thousand, 2000).

## **Spiritual Literacy in Educational Leadership**

One important way for leaders to promote spirituality in education is to have a solid understanding of spiritual literacy both within and outside of the classroom. What is spiritual literacy? Brussat and Brussat (1996) state that "Spiritual literacy is the ability to read the signs written in the texts of our own experiences."

Educational leaders should be shepherds for their staffs who would then guide their students to find the sacred in everyday life; in the classroom, at home, at work, in nature, at play, in all aspects of human relationships, and with the individual's relationship to the universe.

Spiritual literacy should not just be a cloistered religious practice for the initiated, such as priests and ministers. Educational leaders should promote this as a basic literacy that enables the reading and use of the larger meaning and interconnection in all of life. Spiritual literacy can be seen among the world's indigenous cultures that have a long tradition of reading and using these "signs" and "symbols" of the sacred world around them. Unfortunately, in most of the developed countries, spiritual literacy seems to be a lost skill, and it would appear that many people there might be spiritually illiterate (Brussat & Brussat, 1996). Spiritual illiteracy may be a more serious problem than actual illiteracy; and may well contribute to many of humanity's

contemporary problems. Spiritual illiteracy means that people don't see the web that connects them with other people and to nature (Tolle, 2005; Wilson, 2003). Spiritual illiteracy means that people do not have access to open the doors of their souls; which could lead them to information and inspiration and to more fulfilling, productive, and happy lives. Spiritual illiteracy makes the world a much emptier, bleak, and dark place with less opportunity, limited and sheltered meaning, and a reduced capability to create the kind of future that we would all hope to achieve (Brussat & Brussat, 1996; Tacey, 2000). "Some might go further to say that being spiritually illiterate can lead to increased feelings of purposelessness, disconnection, isolation and loneliness in the world" (Moore, 1994).

Educational leaders must do all they can to promote spiritual literacy to stimulate the inner lives (Koestenbaum, 1991) of their staff and students, and themselves.

## **Challenges**

The effective leader of today faces large and serious challenges. He/she must contend with many myths, misinformation, and propaganda. The politics involved in leadership is interesting and it takes tremendous character to hold on to one's soul, to maintain discerning right from wrong, and to be "moral" in the true sense of the word (Ellul, 1972; Thom, 2003b). Some of the real dangers in leadership positions include avoiding becoming an authority and control "freak," denying one's true self through narcissism and paranoia (Lowen, 1997), and not fully appreciating followers who tell the leader the truth about himself/herself. An enhanced educational leader surrounds himself/herself with not only followers who agree with him/her, but also with followers who do not. For quality, there needs to exist an atmosphere of "agreeing to disagree" and willing followers.

Generally in organizations, including educational ones, top-down, authoritarian leadership has been replaced by a

consultative, worker-empowering style. In essence, this article at hand argues for enlightened educational leadership, that of the spirit, in the context of a pluralistic, reforming reality (Barlosky, 2005; Ho & Thom, 2005).

The leader's personal true freedom comes from being the real self (Lowen, 1997) through not being focused on how others are defining him/her. Through spirituality, one develops the mind. One's concentration, awareness, quality of attention, sharing, and even one's physical posture improve. Increased insight into and sensitivity to male/female differences (Gray, 2003) results; as witnessed particularly in the Western media, more and more, real life experience seems to be viewed as Freudian oral/genital experience (Freud, 1961; Thom, 1983). Further, when spiritual, an educational leader embraces encouraging every other person, saying what one thinks, and displaying a sense of humour. Living in infinity, approaching living as an art, and facing death itself also result. Again, refined definition with respect to these concepts will appear in good time.

## Conclusion

There is a growing awareness for the need for spirituality in educational leadership (Doetzel, 2004). However, the problems facing educational leaders are how to translate this growing awareness into practice. Nurturing and developing spirituality is crucial at this time in human and educational history---there is a prophetic evolving.

A national poll done in the United States by *Newsweek Magazine* (with beliefnet.com) for its special September 5, 2005 issue on Spirituality reflected the fact that there is a flowering of spirituality again in both organized religion and in the personal sense. It also noted that this increased interest in spirituality has not been reflected in increased attendance at churches. Instead the poll suggests that many people are looking for a personal connection to the

spiritual, through many diverse paths. A very interesting finding in the poll was that the fastest growing category was the "None" answer when respondents were asked about their religious affiliation. However, at the same time, the poll found that more Americans described themselves as spiritual, than those that responded as religious. This poll reflects a rebirth of spirituality in First World countries such as the United States, perhaps due to the myriad economic, political, and environmental issues facing the world today. The increasing interest in spirituality must also be reflected by in educational curriculum, and the best direction of this curriculum can only come through wise and spiritually enlightened educational leadership.

The world is truly a global village now, connected by new fast paced technology, a precarious world economy, and a fragile environment. China and India are growing world powers. Humanity faces shared problems such as overpopulation, declining resources, pollution, illiteracy, and global political instability that threaten all of us. In this context, there is a significant need for educational leaders to bring spirituality into education in order to help develop themselves and others to face many dire challenges of "gloom and doom" and bring them into the educational context.

Today's mass education systems, combined with the rapidity of modern technology and mass communications, offer educational leaders an excellent opportunity to be leaders and optimistic guides for a new generation of spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually enhanced and empowered staff and students. To understand this in the context of the specific spiritual orientation of Buddhism, the Dalai Lama's words are relevant, and reflect the importance of this opportunity for educators:

In today's highly interdependent world, individuals and nations can no longer resolve many of their problems by themselves. We need one another. We must therefore develop a sense of universal responsibility...It is our

collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weaker members, and to preserve and tend to the environment in which we all live (Lama, 1990, pp. 113-114).

Centuries ago, pertinent to the times, Jesus Christ, of another specific spiritual persuasion--Christianity--lived out the philosophy of which the Dalai Lama speaks. It seems that humanity may be losing its way; therefore it is imperative that educational leaders look to their souls to help them find the correct path and to recover and remember who we really are and who we are meant to be. Educational leaders can be lights along this path by promoting and implementing spirituality in their respective education systems (Thom, 1984).

Times change; sound values do not. For sure, the world is imperfect and seeks "change for the sake of change." Educational leadership is complex in its multifaceted nature, as is the thoughtful educational leader. Secular humanism caters to our five senses, not to our spiritual dimensions that go beyond religion into wonder, the awesome, truly serving, and the magical and mystical. Common sense is very important. It may take regular meditation for the educational leader to live in the moment, to open the heart to such things as forgiveness, "doing unto others" (a common theme in many religions of the world), to revere what lasts, the sound of silence, and other pure spirituality in our noisy culture. Many cultures in the Eastern part of the world are quite spiritual, often revealed through male/female relationships (Gray, 2003; Grzelakowski, 2005).

The resulting rewards are balance, insight, calm, and true personal freedom to do what is right and good, physically and emotionally (Burns, 1999).. Optimism, choosing one's battles, and the belief that things improve as developments unfold gain prominence. Growing phenomena such as stem cell research, "intelligent design" (Wallis, 2005), brain research (Gazzagni,

2005; Shanor, 1999), and quantum theory--including quantum theology (O'Murchu, 2004) will be considered in the perspectives of time and history.

The main issue is, "Will these entities be around for a long time?" Of interest is that all of these phenomena can be cast in the spiritual way. For instance, neuroscientist Michael Gazzagni (2005) asserts that ethics are actually encoded in one's brain, and O'Murchu (2004)'s discussion of energy/ waves/ frequency breaking down into particles could explain movement of a person's spirit, including the Holy Spirit, from one place to another.

At the proper moment, truth must be introduced to power. The arguments about how to define theology, religion, and spirituality and the debates about preferred religious persuasions (rooted in varying degrees of literal translation) will continue undoubtedly. However, there is always the one same God and sustained faith in that God.

The promise is for resurrection, increased understanding of tolerance, and great strides forward in the practice of education and its directed, virtuous leadership in the increasingly pluralistic and tolerant cosmopolitan international society. With time, further clarity, evolving brevity in expression, and complete revelation of the consecution of these forgoing ideas will convey the larger meanings that spirituality provides to educational leaders' work, and will affect those who matter the most--the students. For all concerned, meditation within and compassion and cheerfulness outwardly promise the achievement of educational leadership in the spiritual way.

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